

**Collins Springs Primitive Baptist Church
c. 1866**

Founded circa 1850, the original church was destroyed in 1864 by the Federal Army and rebuilt after the Civil War. The church, cemetery and nearby spring carry the name of James A. Collins, an Atlanta pioneer, merchant and local landowner. His promise made before his death in 1862 was fulfilled in 1870 when Collins' daughter transferred title to two acres of surrounding land to the church. The building, which began as a one-room weatherboard structure supported by stacked stone pillars and hand-hewn beams, was modernized with the installation of plumbing in the 1950s and a vestibule and brick veneer in the 1960s. In its heyday, the church had dozens of members, with multiple generations attending services here. But with increased commercial development in the area and a declining membership, the congregation disbanded in 2001.

Cobb County Historic Marker Project - 2009

Sources – Collins Springs Primitive Baptist Church

Atlanta Freethought Society. This organization purchased the former church building in 2008. The collection of materials assembled during the course of research by members of the society contains copies of deeds, census records, maps, wills, and other genealogical information, as well as photographs taken from 2006 to the present. Any reference to these materials will have the notation "AFS Collection".

Banks, Mark (Atlanta Freethought Society), conversation on 7/26/2008.

Buckner, Ed (Atlanta Freethought Society), conversation on 7/26/2008.

Cobb County Superior Court Deed Room, visited February 23, 2009.

Collins Springs Cemetery Association. This organization acquired ownership of the cemetery across the street from the church in 2004. Many of its members attended services at the church at one time or another, and have family members buried in the cemetery. The association held its annual meeting at the former church building on 2/22/2009.

Collins Springs Cemetery Association News Letter, August 1997. (Copy on file at the Smyrna Museum).

"Collins Springs Primitive Baptist Church". *Lives and Times*, Publication of the Smyrna Historical & Genealogical Society, May – June, 2001. (Copy on file at the Smyrna Museum).

Davis, George B., Major, U.S. Army, Leslie J. Perry, Civilian Expert, Joseph W. Kirkley, Civilian Expert, Capt. Calvin D. Cowles, Compiler. *The Official Military Atlas of the Civil War*, reprint, New York: Fairfax Press, 1983. (This volume was originally published as *Atlas to Accompany the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*. Washington: Government Printing Office, 1891-1895.)

Dickey, Jennifer W., Ph.D., Kennesaw State University, email response dated 2/20/2009.

Garrett, Franklin M. *Atlanta and Environs, A Chronicle of Its People and Events*, 1954. Reprint, Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1988.

Herren-Floyd, Susie (Collins Springs Cemetery Association), conversation on 2/22/2009.

Holder, Philip (Collins Springs Cemetery Association), conversations in person on 2/22/2009 and on the telephone 4/17/2009.

"Letter (of solicitation) from D.H. Maner to "Friend." *Collins Springs Cemetery Association News Letter*, December 1, 1997. (Copy on file at the Smyrna Museum).

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McDaniel, Jan (Collins Springs Cemetery Association), conversation on 2/22/2009.

McQueen, Tucker. "Old cemetery a blessing and a burden." *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, January 1, 1998. (On microfilm in the Georgia Room, Cobb County Central Library).

"Members of Collins Springs Baptist Church". *Lives and Times*, Publication of the Smyrna Historical & Genealogical Society, January – February, 2000. (Copy on file at the Smyrna Museum).

Minutes and Membership List of the Collins Springs Primitive Baptist Church, (1866-1936). (On microfilm at the Georgia Archives, Drawer 263, Box 56. Copy also on file at the Smyrna Museum.)

Southern, Lew (Atlanta Freethought Society), conversations on 7/26/2008 and 2/22/2009.

Temple, Sarah Blackwell Gober. *The First Hundred Years: A Short History of Cobb County, in Georgia*, 1935. Reprint, Atlanta, GA: Cherokee Publishing Company, 1980.

Westbrook, Charles, Pastor, telephone conversation on 4/17/2009. (Elder Westbrook was pastor of this church for a couple of years in the early 1980s, and his father served as pastor for about ten years, including during the early 1970s.)

White, Gayle. "Atheist group calls former church home." *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, February 16, 2008.
http://www.ajc.com/living/content/living/stories/2008/02/15/atheists_0216.html
(accessed January 28, 2009)

Collins Springs Primitive Baptist Church
c. 1866¹

Founded circa 1850,² the original church³ was destroyed in 1864 by the Federal Army⁴ and rebuilt after the Civil War.⁵ The church, cemetery and nearby spring carry the name of James A. Collins, an Atlanta pioneer⁶, merchant,⁷ and local landowner.⁸ His promise made before his death in 1862⁹ was fulfilled in 1870 when Collins' daughter transferred title to two acres of surrounding land to the church.¹⁰ The building, which began as a one-room weatherboard structure supported by stacked stone pillars and hand-hewn beams¹¹, was modernized with the installation of plumbing in the 1950s and a vestibule and brick veneer in the 1960s.¹² In its heyday the church had dozens of members,¹³ with multiple

¹ The reconstruction date could be 1866 or 1870. Deed Book B, Page 593 (copy also on file in the AFS Collection). On 8/3/1870 Mrs. S.E. Ogburn** transferred title to two acres of land to the church in respect for the memory of her father, James A. Collins. The boundaries were described in relation to the "old church house". (**Within the AFS Collection various records were found that show variations in the spelling of the last name, such as Ozburn, Osborn, etc.) McQueen stated the church was rebuilt in 1866. Minutes, 3/24/1866 was when the "Brother Clerk" was asked to "procure a church book & Register the Constitution & decorum as near the original as possible & record all the names of the Brethren & Sisters..." On 8/25/1866 it was recorded that the new book was received. (A transcription of a portion of these minutes is also contained in both *Lives and Time* editions, 2000, 3-4 and 2001, 46-48.) Minutes, 1/24/1870, mentioned a committee that met "...and agreed & decided to build a new plank meeting house 28 by 40 feet". Southern (2/22/09) advised that the dimensions of the main room of the building are about 24 by 40 feet, and that the dimensions of the picnic area are the same. White stated it opened in 1866.

² Collins Springs Cemetery Association News Letter, 8/1997, stated the church was established sometime after 1833, and 12/1/1997 stated the church and cemetery date back to 1832. McQueen stated the church was founded in 1832. Temple, 660, in her survey of graves in the Collins Springs Cemetery, found that the oldest legible death date documented on a headstone belonged to Charlie M. Maner who died on 7/21/1857. Westbrook stated it is possible that the church existed in the 1840s because Thomas Hooper who kept the minutes (and recorded the destruction of the church) was known to be in the area in 1850.

³ Davis, et. al., Plate LX, the church is one of the sites noted on this map which is dated 1864. In addition, some copies of Temple's book include a map based on Plate LX, and the church is noted there as well.

⁴ Minutes, opening statement, possibly dated 3/24/1866. (The page was torn such that the last number in the year was missing.) In addition to the building, it was stated that the "Church Book and the constitution and decorum" were also destroyed at this time.

⁵ Minutes, opening statement, mentioned a resolution by church members "...that we build up the said House at the same place...", Minutes, 1/24/1870, White.

⁶ Garrett, Vol. 1, 18, 207, 263, 541, 903, Vol. II, 468.

⁷ Garrett, Vol. 1, 18, 207, 263, 541, 903, Vol. II, 468.

⁸ Cobb County deeds containing some reference to James A. Collins (in active ownership, sale by his heirs, or in his memory) include the following: Book B, Page 593 – LL822, 823; Book C, Page 603 – LL895, 898, 899; Book D 400 – LL961, 962, 964, 965, 1022; Book I, Page 238 – LL898, 899; Book M, Page 384 – LL894, 895.

⁹ Garrett, Vol 1, 207, 541.

¹⁰ Deed Book B, Page 593, see footnote #1.

¹¹ Flack, my original tour of the building took place on 7/26/2008. Banks, Buckner and Southern pointed out various features such as the stacked stone pillars supporting hand-hewn beams under the building as well as the cement blocks that were added later for additional support, a section of the original weatherboard behind an opening in the sheet rock, and they also drew attention to those features that are plainly visible. (Photos of both the inside and outside of the building are included in the AFS Collection.) Holder, Philip (4/17/2009), advised that he has photographs of family members in front of the wooden building, and that one of the people pictured died in 1959.

¹² One of the features pointed out in 7/2008 were the windows and their aluminum tracks. Dickey advised that aluminum windows came into use in the 1950s. Herren-Floyd recalled the unimproved condition of the building from when she attended services as a child with her grandmother and aunt. Her grandmother died in 1952. Holder,

generations attending services here.¹⁴ But with increased commercial development in the area¹⁵ and a declining membership,¹⁶ the congregation disbanded in 2001.¹⁷

see footnote #9. McDaniel also occasionally attended services as a child, and later did some further research, and she also stated the dates given above. Southern (2/22/2009) told the following story to those in attendance at the Cemetery Association meeting: Recently a Water Department employee had mentioned to Southern that in about 1960 when he was five years old, his grandfather had worked on installing the brick veneer. The grandfather had bought the boy a wagon and paid him a penny for each brick he hauled away. White mentioned these features were added later, but didn't specify a date.

¹³ *Lives and Times*, 2000, among the transcribed data are two lists of names. The first list contained more than eighty names and was recorded near the beginning of the Church Book in 1866. The purpose of the second list is unknown and a date for it was not stated. It contained more than sixty names that were different from those on the first list. Westbrook, it was his opinion that the church never had more than about thirty-five members at any one time given that the surrounding area was rural for more than half a century. White used the word "dozens".

¹⁴ McQueen, Temple, survey of graves, 658-662. Herren-Floyd, McDaniel, Westbrook.

¹⁵ McQueen, White.

¹⁶ Herren-Floyd mentioned that her relative Mary Lee Herren died at age 101 in 2000. McQueen's words were "...only a handful of elderly church members attend services once a month.", Westbrook stated the decline could be attributed to members dying or moving away, and he clarified that they were "old school Baptists" who didn't proselytize or do foreign missionary work. He told of one member who died at age 101, but did not state that person's name. He advised there were about eight members in 2001 when the congregation disbanded. White said there were fewer than a dozen members by the mid 1990s.

¹⁷ Deed Book 13409, page 6324-6, WB Church LLC purchased the land on which the church building is located from Collins Springs Primitive Baptist Church on 8/27/2001. Deed Book 14581, page 1750, AFS purchased the land (and building) on 2/18/2008 from WB Church LLC. White (citing her interview with Westbrook) stated the building was sold to a developer that wanted to build a Kroger across Atlanta Road. As the church was in disrepair and the congregation didn't have the money to maintain it, the decision was made to sell it. Westbrook confirmed same during our telephone conversation.

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